



## WHY PUBLICIZE OPTIMIST EVENTS?

*What's the benefit of trying to get something in the paper?  
The media cover what they want.  
We know we do quality work; why should we brag about it?*

These are a few of the responses members often have when they find themselves faced with the task of “alerting the media” to an Optimist activity. And these reactions can be understandable if you’ve tried to publicize an event. But it is important to communicate the good work your club is doing, and this guide will show you how. But, first, here are a few reasons why your club should make public relations a priority:

- Consider some of the purposes of the Optimist Club — to develop optimism as a philosophy of life; to promote an active interest in civic affairs; and to aid and encourage the development of youth. By letting the media know the kind of work Optimists do — Safety on Wheels Program, Optimists in Action Day and Respect for Law Week — you can let your community actually see how overall Optimist goals are translated into action.
- If your club is actively seeking new members — and what club isn’t? — a photo of an Optimist Day of Non-Violence event in a community newspaper just may give a civic-minded citizen the notion to contact a co-worker whom he or she knows is involved in the Optimist organization.
- Remember that prospective member your club has been wooing for the past few months? Maybe he never knew that the Oratorical Contest his niece won last year has been a long-standing Optimist project. The realization that he could get involved in projects of such importance to him and his family may weigh heavily in his membership decision.
- All clubs need “new blood.” By spreading the word about such fun, family-oriented events as the Safety on Wheels Program, clubs may get inquiries about Optimist membership from community members who had no previous contact with service clubs.
- Through repeated listings in community calendars and post-event photos of Optimist activities, your club can increase its local profile, which can lead to different charitable involvement and potential partnerships with area businesses.
- The Optimist Club is not the only organization that would benefit from an article in a neighborhood newspaper about Youth Appreciation Week. The non-profit group you’re partnering with also will receive recognition, which in turn could foster more community interest and involvement in both organizations.
- Finally, don’t forget that public relations efforts also can benefit a club internally. Nothing inspires an Optimist more than to hear that friends and co-workers are talking about Sunday’s community festival. Think how your club members would react if they were recognized for putting together a successful event.





## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

*Unfortunately, public relations isn't an exact science. Wouldn't it be terrific if it was? You pick up the phone, tell a reporter about an Optimist event and, voila, it magically appears on the front page of your city's daily paper. Guaranteed. Every time.*

But, that's not how it is. The concept of public relations is broad based, involving building relationships, interacting with the community; media relations is only a piece of the pie. One won't work without the other.

This is how it plays out. By strengthening your club's relationships with representatives from throughout the community, you can enhance your club's local reputation. And, when an organization works within a local structure and is perceived as performing a valuable community service, publicity and good media contacts are that much easier to cultivate.

What follow are techniques on building on the existing relationships your members already have and developing new ones with key community segments:

- Since building relationships is so important, your club may want to set aside a meeting to discuss strengthening members' contacts.
- The first step in relationship-building is to look at your club's membership list. Do you have members from business, the professions, education, community organizations, government, labor, etc.? If not, you may want to keep in mind your club's strengths and weaknesses when recruiting new members.
- After looking at your own members, take an informal written survey on your members' contacts. Does a long-standing member have a relative in a leadership position in one of your community's labor unions? Is your club president on a board with a city council member? Is your daughter on a basketball team with the son of the features editor of the local paper?
- Next, encourage your members to talk to these local leaders about the Optimist Club, its objectives, and its place in the community. Let them know about upcoming Optimist projects and the results of some past initiatives. Make it clear that you're not trying to drum up new members (*but if someone wants to join, that's great!*), but rather letting people know about the kind of impact the Optimists have on the community.
- You may even want to take the step of getting involved with a worthwhile community organization that has a board comprised of local influentials — business leaders, the curator of the art museum, a leading community volunteer, etc. If several Optimist members volunteer their time for a new cause, they may find themselves in contact with new segments of the community, which could present new membership opportunities or enable your club to get a reputation around town as a vibrant, valuable asset to the community.



- Consider inviting a community leader to speak at an upcoming Optimist meeting. Why? It will give your club the chance to expose its programs and activities to a new and influential audience, and it provides your members with a glimpse into a new segment of the community.
- How does this tie into public relations? It's not always a direct cause-and-effect process. But after your club begins to work on building relationships, the Optimists may, for example, be asked to work with that labor leader on a project to rebuild homes of flood victims — a visual, service-oriented project the media may want to photograph. Or, last month's speaker is an entrepreneur who is a biking enthusiast — maybe his company would want to sponsor the upcoming Safety on Wheels Program.
- Remember — the opportunity to build effective relationships is all around us. Look everywhere for a chance to spread the word about the Optimists and be prepared for it to pay off — if not tomorrow, then when you least expect it.



## KNOWING THE MEDIA

Imagine starting a new job in sales. On your first day, bursting with enthusiasm, you immediately plunge in and start making calls. You may sound something like this:

*“Hi, my name is Joe Expert and I’m with Widgets R Us. You’ll never find another widget better than ours, and I think you should buy 200 cases. . . . You never use widgets? Why would I ever think you would be interested in widgets? . . . Well, our widgets are the best, and they deserve to be used. . . . Hello? Hello?”*

As unthinkable as this conversation would be in the business world, it unfortunately goes on every day in newsrooms. Well-meaning people call reporters and editors and — without ever reading the newspaper in question or without understanding who watches the newscast and why — insist the Cholesterol Grill’s employee picnic deserves to be on the news. At 10 o’clock. And not one of those minute-long stories, either. Why? “Because we’re a good company, and our employees have worked hard this year. They deserve a little recognition.”

Read on for tips on understanding the media.

### MEDIA OVERVIEW

- The first step in garnering publicity for a local club is to gain a thorough understanding of local media —both major newspaper and television stations, along with smaller community papers and radio stations.
- The best way to do this is to read your community’s newspapers and pay attention to TV newscasts and radio programs. What kind of stories do they like to cover? Do they mention the group that organized the AIDS Walk? Do the community papers run photos of various committees of non-profit groups? Is there a morning TV news or radio show that has in-studio guests from the community talking about their projects? Try and develop a good working knowledge of who covers what kind of news and why.
- Here are characteristics of each type of major media. Remember, these principles typically are valid, whether you are dealing with media in a large or smaller city:

—**ALL MEDIA** are under tremendous deadline pressures, whether it’s at the end of a day for daily newspapers or at 5, 6 and 10 p.m. for television stations. The stress levels are high for reporters and editors, and because of this, they rarely have time to discuss your event for more than a minute or so.



## TIPS:

- As mentioned, reporters and editors aren't always the friendliest people, particularly around deadline times. Make sure you call mid-morning (*unless you are calling a TV station with a noon show*) and never call late afternoon, as the paper is being finalized and the evening news is being put together.
- When calling, you may want to say the following: This is Joe Jones from the Optimist Club. Is this a bad time? [*This allows the editor to let you know if he/she is in the middle of a crisis and also makes you look savvy and considerate.*] I'm updating a media list and can you tell me who covers education news? Thanks for your time.

— **NEWSPAPER** reporters cover certain topics — called “beats” — and these can range from general assignment to business to politics to community news. By familiarizing yourself with the newspapers you will be approaching, you can learn which reporter covers education topics, which editor puts together a collection of activities pertaining to non-profit organizations. (In smaller cities, one reporter may cover a number of topics. Just be aware of which reporters are writing which stories.) Or, if you're still uncertain, you also can call the media outlets and ask who covers what.

- In general, **newspaper** reporters are more well-informed than their broadcast counterparts and conduct longer, more detailed interviews. It usually is wise to prepare extensively for a newspaper interview since reporters will ask a variety of questions.
- On the positive side, **newspaper** reporters must go back to the paper to file stories, which will give you an opportunity to call the reporter and clarify any information or to provide more detail.
- In recent years, **television** stations also have established “beats” for their reporters — health, education, sports, politics, etc. Again, familiarize yourself with the stations in your area, so you can approach an appropriate reporter.
- **Television** interviews can be live or taped, depending on the importance of the event. Appearance is of the utmost importance during a television interview, so make sure you appear relaxed, well-groomed, confident and credible.
- Regardless of the format, **television** requires a series of brief answers to interview questions, as opposed to detailed explanations that you may use for print interviews. While being interviewed, keep answers to around 15 seconds.
- Like television, **radio** interviews can be either live or taped. Due to the magic of radio, club officials can refer to notes, copies of press releases, etc., during the interview.
- The emphasis during a radio interview is on the club official's voice — pace and inflection. If your objective is to encourage listeners to come out this weekend to the bike safety festival, let your enthusiasm for the project come through.

- In addition to the above-mentioned major media, most cities also have smaller community or suburban press. Below are a few characteristics of this media:

- How exactly do you define community or suburban publications? These newspaper/magazines are usually free and are available around town or are delivered directly to homes or apartments. They contain information of interest to local citizens and focus on specific communities, as opposed to appealing to an entire region as do daily newspapers.
- Community or suburban newspapers see themselves as the showcases for events around town. They typically have small staffs and have their hands full just producing the paper on a weekly basis.

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- As a result, suburban papers may not have the staff to come out and cover your event, but they are likely candidates to give advance coverage for an upcoming Optimist activity or to print a photograph taken at the event, with participants' names listed. (*You may want to ask an Optimist member who is a camera buff to be responsible for taking photos at events.*)
- Suburban newspapers also have strong community calendar sections that are very appropriate for publicizing Optimist events. These sections often have deadlines several weeks in advance, so be sure you check with the editors of these sections to make sure you are submitting information in time.
- Because of their small staffs, community papers often don't have the time to generate their own stories. As a result, they may print a news release almost verbatim if it is well-written and constructed like a news story.
- Also, some smaller radio and television stations produce public affairs shows. There may be opportunities to get Optimist officials on these shows. These shows usually air early Saturday and Sunday mornings — discussing an upcoming community event.

## DEVELOPING A MEDIA LIST

- Now that you have been researching the media in your area, it's time to put your knowledge down on paper — creating what PR professionals call a "media list."
- First, divide it into "print," "television" and "radio" sections. Then, using your phone book, write down the name, address and telephone number of each media outlet.
- Think about the Optimist events you have coming up within the next six months to a year. Are they geared toward education, children, health, sports or government issues?
- Now you're ready for "media contacts." From your research, who at your daily paper or local TV station addresses the above-mentioned topics? For example, have you noticed for the past several weeks, a local newspaper reporter has written several stories about children with disabilities that focus on overcoming significant challenges? Why not put her down on your list and send her information on the next Communications Contest for Hearing Impaired Youth? And what about the top sports announcer who airs a feature on Sunday evenings about local sports heroes and programs? He might be interested in your club's next Tri-Star Sports event.
- Sometimes you may not find the perfect person to cover your event. That's OK; reporters move around quite a bit and often have to pitch in to cover big news stories. For all of your media outlets, call and ask for the names of either the assignment editor (television), news/public affairs director (radio) or city editor (newspaper). (These varying titles are given to individuals at media outlets who act as gatekeepers for the news. They make decisions on what stories reporters should cover and which ones ultimately end up on the news or in the paper.)
- And, remember, when calling, you may want to say the following: "This is Joe Jones from the Optimist Club. Is this a bad time? I'm updating a media list and can you give me the name of your assignment editor? What's the best fax number to reach your newsroom? Thanks for your time."





## DONNING YOUR NEWS HAT

*So what makes news? How can you ever figure out what the media will cover? Do they ever write about anything that's not bad news?*

These are some of the most frustrating questions you can face when trying to publicize Optimist activities. You may think your program has all the makings of a 10 p.m. news feature, but when the day arrives, every TV camera in town is on the side of the highway covering the latest jackknifed tractor/trailer.

Unfortunately, there's no sure-fire recipe for success. And, even when media commit to covering an event, if a five-alarm fire breaks out or a celebrity decides to drop into town, your event probably won't make the cut. But what you can do is develop a creative, compelling event and present it to the media in such a way that piques their interest. (Not to mention hold your breath that no natural disasters occur!)

Here are some tips on determining what makes a story and how to present it to the media in the best light:

### WHAT'S NEWS?

How do you know if your Optimist event is "news" enough to draw media coverage? And, if it's not, what should you do? Here's a checklist:

- **Is your event new?** Unique? The first ever to raise funds to combat spousal abuse, or the only program that offers mentors from the business community to young adults with disabilities?
- **Is it a community-wide event?** Does it draw in big numbers of participants or spectators?
- **If it's a long-standing event, is there an anniversary coming up that can be publicized?** For example, in honor of the Optimist Club's 25th Annual Golf Tournament, a 25-foot-high birthday cake in the shape of a golf club will be unveiled and 25 underprivileged kids will be sent to a local golf clinic for the summer.
- Media love to interview celebrities. **Is your club inviting a well-known expert or celebrity to act as master of ceremonies or honorary chairman for your next event?** If your club has invited Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1995, to be the special guest at the Communications Contest for Hearing-Impaired Youth (and if she has accepted!), by all means don't keep it to yourself. Also, local celebrities — the mayor, local sports heroes, the coach of the college football team — draw media attention, as well.
- **Is the Optimist International President in town to speak to your district?** Take advantage of the President's Notoriety by informing the media.
- **Have you planned anything crazy or off-the-wall?** Remember, TV people need visuals, and most stations run a 15-second fun story — or "kicker" — at the end of each newscast. Consider a mile-long bicycle procession across town to kick off the bike safety event.

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- **Is the event inherently visual?** Do you have Optimists teaming up with inner-city kids to rebuild flood-ravaged homes? Let media know they are welcome to photograph the project. Take advantage of every opportunity!
- **Is the event particularly timely or relevant?** In 1989, in response to Hurricane Hugo, a local Optimist Club distributed copies of a children's book to families to help them deal with the emotional impact of the disaster. Or if your community has been wringing its hands about young people running amok, invite media to the opening of the Optimist-built inner-city playground and let them see a real-life solution.
- **Have you teamed up with a worthwhile charity?** For a great cause? If recent fire fatalities have been attributed to lack of smoke detectors, team up with the local chapter of the International Association of Fire Chiefs to canvass neighborhoods for houses without smoke detectors. Consider donating proceeds from long-standing Optimist events to a new, newsworthy charity — breast cancer research, AIDS, etc.

## TIP:

The best time to raise these key points is during the planning process of an event. It's much easier to create both a compelling event and to attract media attention if these points are considered early on. You don't want to be scrambling for a way to make a ho-hum event exciting the night before it happens.

## TWO KEY POINTS

- **YOU MUST GIVE MEDIA A REASON TO COVER YOUR EVENT.** And that reason can't be because the Optimists are a great organization and have done a lot for the community.
- To better ensure media coverage, **THINK LIKE A REPORTER.** What would make a reporter go to his/her editor and say, "Hey, did you hear about this? The Optimists are marching through town tomorrow collecting guns door-to-door for their gun buy-back program." Or, "I just heard the Optimists' Safety on Wheels Program in the park is going to have a 75-foot-long sandwich in the shape of a bicycle tire."

Even the best-laid plans can come up empty if a few details are overlooked.

- Be aware of what else is going on in town. Don't schedule your Oratorical Contest on the same morning as the Thanksgiving Day Parade.
- Choose a central location and a sensible time. Unless you've invited a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Model as your guest speaker, few Chicago-area media will fight rush hour traffic to cover your 5 p.m. nutrition conference held at a rural Illinois restaurant. In other words, don't give the media a chance to not cover your event by asking them to drive too far from their stations or by scheduling it at a time that's impossible for them to attend.
- Beware of being on the waning side of a trend. If three other service clubs already have received publicity on TV and radio stations for distributing food baskets to the needy, maybe your club should find a different cause — or not worry about media coverage.
- For some reason, media lose everything you will ever send them. Don't think they'll hang on to that news release you sent them two weeks ago and show up unannounced at your event. Send information the day before an event and follow up the morning of the activity with a phone call.

## GETTING READY

*Before contacting the media, it's always a good idea to have a few themes, or messages, to get across and a strong sense of who you want to communicate these messages to. Here are some guidelines for developing key messages and for targeting potential audiences:*

### KEY MESSAGES

A set of predetermined messages allows you to be more strategic when conducting media interviews — not only to provide reporters with information about next week's Optimist Day of Non-Violence program, but also to illustrate how that project fits into the Optimists' overall mission of helping youth.

- Key messages are the primary points of communication about the Optimist Club to the general public.
- In short, key messages are what you want people to know and what you want them to remember about the Optimists.
- Optimist Clubs have a great start when developing key messages — the purposes of the Optimist Club, the Optimist Mission Statement and the Optimist Vision Statement. The ideas highlighted in these documents can be easily formatted into several one- or two-line statements on what you want to convey about the Optimist Clubs.
- While these documents are a terrific beginning to message point development, you may want to poll your fellow members at your next meeting to see if there are any new points that should be mentioned.
- Key messages also can be used when recruiting members. During a busy event where prospective members are being entertained, it may be helpful to keep three or four short messages in mind about why these members would want to join your club.
- In addition to key messages for your club, key points also should be developed for each Optimist event. These messages should help you answer these basic media questions:

—What can you tell me about this event?

—What is the Optimists' involvement on this issue?

—What impact will this event have on local children, families, etc.?

# G E T T I N G R E A D Y

When planning Optimist events, your club most likely gives some thought to who should attend. For example, is the primary audience for the bike safety program families with young children, young adults who enjoy mountain biking, etc., or young professionals who may want to join the Optimist Club to get involved in community work? Then you tailor the activities to the appropriate audience.

The public relations process is quite similar. In garnering public relations for an Optimist event, first you must look at your activity carefully and make sure it's being developed in the most creative or relevant way possible. Then, decide who in the media would be interested in covering the event.

Here are some possibilities:

- **Community Calendars:** All media — newspapers, radio and television, major and minor — produce community calendars. By submitting information on your event several weeks in advance, your Optimist activity will most likely appear in the calendar, which should help increase attendance.
- **Community Newspapers:** In addition to publishing a calendar, most suburban papers see their chief mission as informing readers about community happenings. If your Optimist event is an area-wide golf tournament at a local course, with proceeds helping to teach golf to neighborhood youngsters, it's probably the kind of story a community paper may want to run. These papers also publish photographs of area events as a way of letting their readers know what's been going on in their communities. Most will accept a black-and-white photo of your event that one of your members has taken.
- **Television News:** Competition for air time on local television stations is tough. With only 22 minutes of news — and much of this taken up by national/international news, sports and weather — your event has to be pretty compelling to even be considered. But if your activity is both visual, fun, timely and relevant to the community — the Optimists have decorated statues and monuments around town to kick off their clothing drive to help victims of a recent tornado — you may be in luck.
- **Special Segments:** Sometimes newspapers and TV newscasts run special shows or sections that highlight significant community projects, successful educational initiatives, people/organizations that make a difference, etc. Look at these segments and see if an upcoming Optimist project may be appropriate. For example, a TV reporter airs a segment on Fridays called "Victims Fighting Back." Maybe a club member could call her and let her know about your colleague who had a child seriously injured in a biking accident several years ago and who joined the Optimist Club because of its Safety on Wheels Program. He has chaired the bike program now for four years and helped it triple its attendance. This human interest angle may be the "hook" you need to get media interested in covering the program.
- **Talk Shows:** Some TV and radio stations air talk shows with in-studio guests. These shows can be a great venue for either an Optimist representative or a local or national celebrity guest (better!) to discuss an upcoming event. Let's say Montreal Canadiens' goalie Patrick Roy is coming to kick off the Optimists in Action event. Call your local talk shows and let them know that he is available for an in-studio interview. Or, if the Safety on Wheels program is taking place over the weekend, call the TV station's talk show producer and let him know that the event chair is available to come on the show and discuss safety tips for in-line skaters.
- **Newspaper Stories:** Newspapers have the same space constraints that TV newscasts do, so trying to find a section that's appropriate for your event is your best bet. For example, if the Optimist Golf Tournament is coming up, contact the sports writer at the paper who either covers golf or who writes about up-and-coming athletes. Let him know about past champions and which golfers would be available for interviews.

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- **More Newspaper Coverage:** One of the hardest lessons for public relations people to learn is the idea that every story doesn't merit a feature. Sometimes, an organization's activity may fit into a larger story about a trend or event — and this is often an easier idea to sell to a reporter. For example, if the Optimist Club is participating in a big community event — a Fourth of July celebration, the Memorial Day barbecue, etc. — call the paper and ask to speak to whoever is coordinating coverage of the event. Let him know that club members will be staffing the first-aid booth or will be washing the first 75 cars who park in a special lot. Now, neither one of these activities deserves a feature-length article, but a reporter may mention the booth/service in an overview story on the event or in a souvenir guide.
- **Newspaper Photographs:** Don't underestimate the need for a good photograph in a daily paper. Most papers like to run a few fun, visually interesting photographs each day. Let the newspaper know when and where the balloons will be filled with air for the Optimists' Balloon Race or that the Optimist Club will be painting the faces of children at the Memorial Day barbecue. Both of these present a good opportunity for a photograph.

## PR NUTS & BOLTS

Understanding public relations theory is fine, but sometimes you just need a few practical tips. Read on for some useful hints:

- **Optimist Identification:** You may know it's an Optimist event because you've been on the committee for about 37 years. But everyone else in the community — particularly the media — may not. Make sure at all events you have a nice, colorful banner in a visible place that says "Optimists in Action Day, presented by the Optimist Club of \_\_\_\_\_." You also may want to have an information table set up at each activity so people who want more information about the Optimists know where they can go with questions.
- **Optimist Information:** So what should go on this information table? Here are a few ideas:
  - Create a banner — Optimist Club of Anywhere Information — that can fit in front of your information table.
  - Include membership information — like the "Make a Difference" brochure, magazines, brochures, etc.
  - Your club should have a one-page fact sheet on its activities. Include major facts (*when chartered, how many members, when/where meetings are held, names of executive officers, etc.*), as well as significant projects undertaken in the past year and any awards earned.
  - Consider developing a one-page sheet that lists benefits to joining your local Optimist Club, including the kinds of activities and projects in which members can participate.
  - If your members come from diverse occupational and educational backgrounds, perhaps a profile sheet on current members may be useful. It could help show prospective members the breadth of new contacts they could meet by joining your club.
  - And, of course, make sure these materials are fresh and crisp. Nothing is more uninviting than a dog-eared fact sheet that gives the impression it's been carted around from event to event.

# GETTING R E A D Y



- **Photography:** Some neighborhood and community newspapers will accept photos submitted to them by community organizations.
  - Use a professional photographer if your budget allows or an Optimist member who's skilled at photography.
  - Include an Optimist banner or another easily identifiable sign in the picture.
  - Balance the subjects carefully and don't try to include more than six people in the shot.
  - Aim for an interesting angle to the photo instead of a group of people. Maybe have the Optimist Bike Safety committee members stand alongside an obstacle course or have them pose with the 75-foot bicycle tire cake.
  - Attach a descriptive caption to the back of the photo that identifies the people pictured, the name of the club and a contact name and number.
  - Make sure the quality of the photo is good — not a Polaroid — and use black-and-white film. Also, do not ask the paper to return the photo.
- **Optimist Letterhead:** When developing fact sheets, membership profiles and, later, press releases, your club will need stationery that will allow both media and prospective members to notice your materials at a glance. With the advent of home computers and desktop publishing, almost anyone can design good-looking letterhead. What follows are design hints:
  - The focal point of your letterhead should be the name of your club. Make sure "Arlington Heights Optimist Club," for example, is placed prominently near the top of the page.
  - If there is a logo your club uses, be sure to incorporate that into the design.
  - If your club uses a P.O. box number or street address, place that, and the club phone number, along the bottom of the sheet.
  - Take your design to a printing store (PIP Printing, Kinko's or a local shop) and tell them you would like any additional design suggestions they may have for your letterhead. Ask for recommendations on color and paper stock. For paper, limit choices to white, cream or pale gray, and ask for 70 to 80 pound stock. Blue, red or black ink are all appropriate color choices.
  - In the printing process, getting higher quantities turns out to be more cost-effective. Don't order less than 1,000 sheets at a time.
  - If your budget allows, also order #10 business envelopes with the Optimist Club name and logo, if used, on the return address.



## COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

*After all this background information, it's finally time to contact the media! What follows is step-by-step instructions on how to write the three primary forms of media communication — the media/photo op advisory, the news release and the introductory letter. But, we don't stop there! You'll also find helpful tips on conducting successful interviews.*

### **MEDIA ADVISORY** *(see Appendix)*

- A media advisory alerts reporters and editors to your event by providing them with the five Ws — what, why, who, when and where.
- Put a contact name and daytime phone number at the top of the advisory. Also include the following two address lines, which should be boldfaced and underlined.

**ATTENTION: NEWS/ASSIGNMENT/PHOTO EDITORS**  
**MEDIA ADVISORY FOR \_\_\_\_\_ (DAY AND DATE OF EVENT.)**

- Next, think up a descriptive, compelling headline:  
**AKRON OPTIMISTS TO LAUNCH GUN BUY-BACK PROGRAM**
- On the remainder of the page, explain your event, using the “What, Why, Who, When, Where” format. Try and keep the information to one page.
- Media advisories should be sent the day before and the morning of the event. Send them to reporters and editors you think would be interested in the activity. Then, after you send the day-of-the-event advisory, call and let the newsrooms know you are following up on the advisory. Answer any questions they may have.
- If the visual aspect of your event takes place in the middle of a program, be sure and mention — as accurately as possible — when this will take place. For example, if the clothing drive kickoff begins at noon, be sure and say that the covers will be pulled off the statues at 12:30 p.m.
- Media advisories should be sent the day before and the morning of the event. Send them to reporters and editors you think would be interested in the activity. Then, after you send the day-of-the-event advisory, call and let the newsrooms know you are following up on the advisory. Answer any questions they may have.



## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY ADVISORY *(see Appendix)*

- A photo opportunity advisory alerts photographers at newspapers and television stations to an event that is visual and unique.
- Put a contact name and daytime phone number at the top of the advisory. Also include the following two address lines, which should be boldfaced and underlined.

**ATTENTION: ASSIGNMENT/PHOTO EDITORS**  
**MEDIA ADVISORY FOR \_\_\_\_\_ (day and date of event)**

- Next, think up a descriptive, compelling headline:  
**AKRON OPTIMISTS UNVEIL SHARP-DRESSED STATUES TO KICK OFF CLOTHING DRIVE**
- On the remainder of the page, explain the event, using the “What, Why, Who, When, Where” format. Try and keep the information to one page.
- Use descriptive language to convey why this event is compelling.

## NEWS RELEASE *(see Appendix)*

- A news release is a way to convey information to the media. It either can alert the media to a new development or explain the significance of an event.
- Using your new Optimist letterhead, type the words “**NEWS RELEASE**” on the top of the paper. Also include “**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,**” along with the date on the upper left hand corner of the paper. On the upper right hand corner, list the name and number of a contact person.
- Then, think up a descriptive, compelling headline:  
**AKRON OPTIMISTS HIT THE BIKE TRAILS WITH THE 25TH ANNUAL BIKE SAFETY PROGRAM**
- Write as concisely as possible and try not to send voluminous news releases. Two pages is more than enough for most events.
- Reporters and editors get around 200 pieces of mail each day and most of those are news releases. So yours doesn’t get lost in the stack, make sure your first paragraph is as compelling as possible. Highlight what is unique, visual, funny or timely about your event.
- Make sure the first or second paragraphs include all relevant information — who, what, when, where and why.



- Try and answer as many questions as possible. When does the event start? Is it open to the public? Do I need to buy tickets? Will there be a celebrity guest? Will the proceeds of the event benefit a certain organization?
- Type the word “**MORE**” at the bottom of the page to indicate that there is another page of the release. On the upper left hand side of the second sheet, type the words “**OPTIMIST BIKE SAFETY PROGRAM, ADD ONE.**” This indicates that this is the second page of the release.
- The last paragraph of the release is called the “boilerplate,” and it usually is made up of three or four sentences that describe the club. It can include information on when the club was founded, how many members it has and what its chief activities are. You also may want to give a contact name and number for membership information. Use this boilerplate paragraph on all releases.
- Finally, type the symbols # # # at the end of the release to let the reader know this is the end of the copy.
- News releases can be sent to the media either prior to an event or the day the event takes place. If you are planning to have a release available at your activity, be sure you send a media/photo advisory a day or so before so the media know to come.

## **INTRODUCTORY LETTER** *(see Appendix)*

- An introductory letter can be used to encourage media to grant an interview. These letters are more personal and can be a little softer sell than a news release. It also gives you the opportunity to set up interviews before an event, even if the news release has yet to be written.
- For example, if the Optimists in Action program is next month, you may want to send a few letters to local TV and radio talk shows, mentioning that you have a spokesperson who can discuss ways typical citizens can have a dramatic impact on the community.
- Use the letter to give reporters a compelling reason to interview your spokesperson. Mention the significance of the event to the community — for example, the gun buy-back program will help take guns off the street and help curb neighborhood violence.
- Send the letter to the TV talk show’s producer or the radio station’s news/public affairs director.
- After waiting for a few days, follow up with the contact. *“Hi, this is Joe Jones from the Akron Optimist Club. Is this a good time? . . . I sent you a letter a few days ago that mentioned Bill Smith was available to talk about next month’s gun buy-back program. Since ‘Akron Today’ often features community solutions to complex problems, we thought the show might be a great forum to discuss how the program will take upwards of 500 guns off the street.”*



## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

### *Before the interview:*

- Know the reporter, publication/program, interview format, audience.
- Know your **goal** for the interview. Do you want to encourage viewers/listeners to attend an event? Do you want to convey that the Optimists are a vital community resource? This is your interview — not the reporter's.
- Know what you want to say. . .write down and review your **key message points**.
- Know the key **audiences** you are addressing (community members, young people, potential members, etc.).
- Jot down likely questions, hard and easy, and appropriate answers. This will make you more comfortable when a reporter asks the same questions.

## INTERVIEW TIPS:

- Speak in “headlines.” Offer key message first (briefly, directly); back it with facts or “proof points.”
- Don't “over answer.” Short answers are better than long.
- Don't be fixated by the question. If a reporter asks a question you're not comfortable with, acknowledge it and move on to a related point you want to make.
- Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution.
- Don't let false charges, facts or figures offered by a reporter stand uncorrected.
- Don't repeat a reporter's negative statements. Frame your reply as a positive statement.
- Don't fall victim to hypothetical, “**what if?**” situations. (*If a reporter asks, “What if the obstacle course at the Bike Safety Program encourages reckless riding,” answer that, “In our 15 years of conducting the program, we've heard nothing but positive comments from parents, and the local police tell us that they attribute the 10 percent decrease in bike accidents to our safety tips.”*)
- Speak clearly. Avoid jargon and bureaucratese.
- Be engaging, likable. Speak to the interviewer, not the camera.
- Don't know the answer? Don't fake it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will find and provide the needed facts in a timely manner; or offer to assist the reporter in finding that other source.
- Don't overlap the interviewer's question; begin your answer when the reporter is finished.
- Keep cool. Don't be provoked. Reporters often ask the same question in several different ways.
- Never lie to a reporter.



*For telephone and radio interviews:*

- Buy preparation time by asking to call the reporter back if deadline allows.
- Establish an “interview atmosphere” and mindset. Don’t think you can joke around and gossip with the reporter for a few minutes and then begin the interview. **Reporters are always working!**
- Use notes.
- Ask questions in order to gain feedback.
- For radio, speak visually — use words, anecdotes, analogies, etc. to paint pictures.

*For television interviews:*

- For men, a dark suit and blue shirt works best. For women, avoid solid black or white, or busy patterns. Bright colors are fine.
- Don’t wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry.
- Sit erect, but not ramrod straight, slightly forward in the chair. Unbutton suit jacket when seated.
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone. Speak and gesture naturally.
- Talk to the reporter/interviewer; not the camera.
- Keep a pleasant expression; smile when appropriate.
- Hold your “interview attitude” from the moment the reporter enters the room until he/she leaves.

**PREPARATION = SUCCESS**  
**ANSWER = QUESTION + KEY POINT**

# APPENDIX TEMPLATE #1

*PERSONALIZED INFORMATION IS IN ITALICS*

For more information, contact  
*John Doe, 314/555-5555*

**ATTN: NEWS/ASSIGNMENT/PHOTO EDITORS  
MEDIA ADVISORY FOR *WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15***

## **BICYCLE RODEO HOSTED BY OPTIMIST CLUB OF *METROPOLIS***

**WHAT:** Get out your ropes and spurs! It's time for the Bicycle Rodeo, presented by the Optimist Club of *Metropolis* as part of its "Safety on Wheels" program. Activities planned during the rodeo include the rail ride, slow ride, long distance ride and spiral ride. In addition, local police officers will be on hand to teach children bicycle safety tips. Also planned is a workshop that will teach children and adults how to properly maintain their bicycles.

The "Safety on Wheels" program is sponsored by Optimist Clubs nationwide to teach youngsters about using bicycles, in-line skates and skateboards safely. The Bicycle Rodeo is just one in a week-long series of activities that take place throughout the program.

**WHO:** Mayor *John Hancock* will be the master of ceremonies for the rodeo. Also present will be Police Chief *Bob Freeman* and Alderman *Davy Jones*. *Freddie Smith*, owner of *Fast Freddie's Bicycle Shoppe* will conduct the bicycle repair workshop.

**WHEN:** *Wednesday, April 15*  
*10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

**WHERE:** *Metropolis Community Park*  
*122 Lakeview Drive*

###

## APPENDIX TEMPLATE #2

*PERSONALIZED INFORMATION IS IN ITALICS*

For more information, contact  
*John Doe, 314/555-5555*

**ATTN: NEWS/ASSIGNMENT/PHOTO EDITORS**  
**PHOTO ADVISORY FOR WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15**

### **OPTIMIST BICYCLE RODEO BEGINS WITH PARADE THROUGH METROPOLIS**

**WHAT:** Hundreds of area children will don spurs and boots as they set out to bike, skateboard and in-line skate from *Metropolis City Hall to Union Market* to kick off the Bicycle Rodeo, sponsored by the Optimist Club of Metropolis.

The Bicycle Rodeo is just one element of the Optimist's week-long "Safety on Wheels" program. Activities planned during the rodeo include the rail ride — where children ride a 150-foot rail — and the slow ride — where participants see who can be the last one to cross the finish line. In addition, local police officers will be on hand to teach children bicycle safety tips.

**WHO:** Mayor *John Hancock* will be the master of ceremonies for the rodeo. Also present will be Police Chief *Bob Freeman* and Alderman *Davy Jones*.

**WHEN:** *Wednesday, April 15*  
*10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

**Children begin lining up for the parade at 9:30 a.m.**  
**The parade concludes at 10:45 a.m.**

**WHERE:** *Metropolis Community Park*  
*122 Lakeview Drive*

###

# APPENDIX TEMPLATE #3

*PERSONALIZED INFORMATION IS IN ITALICS*

For more information, contact  
*John Doe, 314/555-5555*

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### OPTIMIST CLUB OF *METROPOLIS* TO CONDUCT 5TH ANNUAL 'SAFETY ON WHEELS' PROGRAM

METROPOLIS, Ill., April 3, 1995 — Area children will learn to become better bicycle riders, in-line skaters and skateboarders through the Metropolis Optimist Club's "Safety On Wheels" program, slated for April 15-21. "Safety On Wheels" is designed to teach youngsters safety tips and "rules of the road" as they ride and skate.

"We use fun games like the slow race, plank ride and the ride-and-coast to teach young cyclists proper bicycling techniques," said John Doe, Metropolis Optimist Club president. "We also teach children the importance of wearing proper safety gear — helmets, elbow and knee pads — while riding and skating."

"For the safety of our children, it is important that they know how to ride and skate responsibly," said Mayor John Hancock. "This program is perfect because it teaches valuable information in a fun and interactive way."

Activities planned during the "Safety On Wheels" program include:

- Bicycle Rodeo and kick-off parade; Saturday, April 15
- Bicycle, in-line skating and skateboarding safety clinic, Sunday, April 16
- School visits, with Barney the Dinosaur and safety videos, Monday-Friday, April 17-21

To produce the "Safety on Wheels" program, the Metropolis Optimist Club is working in conjunction with the Metropolis police department, Fast Freddie's Bicycle Shoppe and the mayor's office. Area businesses have also donated prizes for the Bicycle Rodeo events.

Optimist International is one of the world's largest and most active service club organizations with more than 155,000 members in 4,200 Optimist Clubs. Carrying the motto, "Friend of Youth," Optimist Clubs conduct positive service programs which reach more than six million young people each year. The local club meets the first Tuesday of the month at the Holiday Inn on Highway 9. Call 314-555-5555 for membership information.

###

*The Optimist Story*

## HOW IT WORKS

*To help you see how public relations really works, we have developed a case study that takes an Optimist event from conception to execution. Can you see how the elements explained in this guide have been put into action?*

### IN THE BEGINNING

- For the past nine years, the Optimist Club of Springfield has sponsored a community festival for area residents. It's always featured a barbecue, clowns, activities for the kids and a raffle. But this year, the club wants to do something a little different and a lot more exciting.
- First, the club defined what it wanted to accomplish. The members wanted to get more recognition for hosting this kind of event and wanted to use it as a way to highlight the club's good work. They also wanted to attract new members.

### PLANNING

- One member mentioned that he was on a board with a local woman who had designed an innovative drug awareness program. The woman, a former Broadway actress, put together a brief play, where children learned how to say no to drugs. The play culminates with the children waving colorful streamers (*that contain printed anti-drug messages*).
- That member suggested teaming up with the actress and using the community festival as a forum for communicating drug abuse prevention to children. Another member reminded everyone that the festival would be celebrating its 10th anniversary, which could also help attract attention.
- The actress agreed to work with the Optimist Club and promised to do whatever she could to spread the word.

### MEDIA EXECUTION

- The Springfield PR committee chair drafted a one-page press release announcing the festival and what would happen at the event. He sent it to the community calendar section of local TV, radio stations and newspapers.
- He also wrote a letter to local TV and radio stations several weeks before the festival, mentioning the event and suggesting the program's creator as a possible interview subject. He later followed up with a phone call and let them know that she could discuss innovative ways to talk to kids about the dangers of drug abuse.



- A radio station and a TV talk show wanted to talk to the actress. The PR chair met with her before the interviews and gave her some helpful tips. In addition to discussing her anti-drug program, she also talked about working with the Optimist Club of Springfield and how it was exciting to find a group of citizens so committed to helping youth. She also invited area residents out to the festival.
- The day before the event, the PR chair sent out a media advisory to his contacts from his media list. He knew that the celebration would be very visual, so he emphasized the colorful parts of the festival and was careful to mention what time it would take place.
- He also was pleased because he had persuaded his fellow members to change the location of the festival to a park in the heart of town. For the past nine years, it had been held at a park 45 miles outside of town. The chairman felt strongly that the media would be more inclined to cover the event — especially with the visual finale — if it were held at a more centrally located place.
- The morning of the event, he followed up with a quick phone call to local media, reminding them of the festival. He again mentioned the children’s streamer celebration and said all proceeds from the raffle would benefit a local drug rehabilitation unit.

## EVENT EXECUTION

- The PR chair also made sure everyone attending the festival — including the media — could find it. He helped design a banner that said “The Optimist Club of Springfield Presents: The Springfield Festival to Benefit Drug Abuse Awareness” and made sure it was in a visible place.
- The membership chair did an equally impressive job with the new Optimist Information Table. He made sure it was easy to find, staffed with eager Optimist members and contained a variety of well-written material. He also escorted new member prospects around the festival, discussing this and other Optimist projects.
- The club president also spent most of the day circulating among the guests, introducing himself and talking about how delighted the club was to work with such a worthwhile project.
- The PR chair made sure he kept a sharp lookout for media. And, to his delight, two television stations and the local paper attended! They wanted to photograph the children dancing with the streamers, but he made sure they knew about the Optimists’ involvement, including the club’s commitment to youth and its 10th anniversary of hosting the festival. He also had included this information in a news release that he handed out to media at the event.

## RESULTS

- Obviously, the 10th Annual Community Festival was a success. It received news coverage for the first time, and the prospective members who attended asked to join. In addition, several members of the community were so impressed with the event that they asked for Optimist membership information. And, even more important, the Optimists themselves were delighted to participate in a new and worthy event.
- The PR chair continued to follow up with the media. He sent photographs — taken by a talented Optimist member — to community papers, and one week later, they appeared in the publications.



## OTHER WAYS TO “TELL THE STORY”

*So far in this guide, we've concentrated on telling the Optimist story through the media. While that's the primary way to accomplish the goal of spreading the word about Optimist programs, it's not the only option.*

### OTHER PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Consider getting involved in community activities where your local club can gain additional exposure. Contact your town's City Hall or Chamber of Commerce for a calendar of local events.
- Once you've found an event that coincides with your club's goals and activities, think about strategic ways to get involved. Can the Optimists sponsor the “Lost Child” area at the community Fourth of July celebration? What about hosting one of the reception areas at your community's big craft fair?
- Optimist members also can volunteer to act as marshals for parades or grand openings or they can also staff community events. By wearing an Optimist T-shirt or hat, you can ensure that your town will know who's helping out.
- Don't forget to make sure everyone attending an Optimist event knows that the Optimist Club is involved. Hang posters banners and be sure and bring along Optimist fact sheets and membership information.
- If your club's budget allows, advertise in the programs of well-attended community events and activities. Or, advertise in your community's local paper or over the airwaves of that radio station. For a big splash, think about purchasing billboard advertising.
- Optimist Supply has on hand very attractive three-color road signs, which can be set up on major roadways in your community.
- The next time the Optimist Club hosts one of its major events, contact City Hall or the State Capitol and get a proclamation from the mayor or governor.
- Explore publicity opportunities with your town's Chamber of Commerce or chief civic organization. Let them know about the Optimist Club and see if opportunities exist to put Optimist material in community informational packets. Or see if the Optimist Club can be included in an organizational directory of local charities or service groups.
- Check around and see if places like City Hall, Chamber of Commerce, or community centers will accept and distribute your extra copies of *The Optimist* magazine.

## **PURPOSES OF OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL**

- *To develop optimism as a philosophy of life utilizing the tenets of the Optimist Creed;*
- *To promote an active interest in good government and civic affairs;*
- *To inspire respect for the law;*
- *To promote patriotism and work for international accord and friendship among all people;*
- *To aid and encourage the development of youth, in the belief that the giving of one's self in service to others will advance the well-being of humankind, community life and the world.*

## **THE OPTIMIST CREED**

### *Promise Yourself-*

*To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.*

*To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.*

*To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.*

*To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.*

*To think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best.*

*To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.*

*To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.*

*To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.*

*To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.*

*To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.*

***Optimist International***

**OPTIMIST**  **INTERNATIONAL**<sup>®</sup>

4494 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis,

MO 63108

314-371-6000, Fax 314-371-6006

Dear Optimist:

The guide you're about to review has the capability of unlocking a whole new world for Optimist International. It's called *Spreading the Word: Telling the Optimist Story*, and it's designed to do just that—enlighten your community about the good work and limitless opportunities offered by Optimist Clubs.

As you know, local Optimist Clubs are often so involved in developing service programs, cultivating new membership and effectively running the club organization that publicizing Optimist projects isn't seen as the highest priority. Yet, by simply spreading the word to local media about Optimist missions—fostering optimism as a way of life and encouraging more people to join a local club. By talking with reporters about an Optimist community service project, you also can help a worthwhile organization become better known in your area.

And it's easier than you think. *Spreading the Word: Telling the Optimist Story* offers complete, concise information on how to talk with the media about Optimist events. The guide includes great tips from former reporters and editors on what the media look for in deciding to cover events. So even if you've been unsuccessful before in trying to publicize Optimist activities, take these ideas to heart and see what kind of results you can bring to your club and community.

Sincerely,

The International Public Relations Committee

W H Y P U B L I C I Z E

O P T I M I S T E V E N T S ?

*The Optimist Story*

W H Y P U B L I C I Z E

O P T I M I S T E V E N T S ?

*The Optimist Story*